Doing Time at Family Video by brodie-wan

Category: Stranger Things, 2016
Genre: Family, Humor
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2019-07-26 18:18:12
Updated: 2019-09-23 14:13:03
Packaged: 2019-12-12 17:44:06
Rating: T
Chapters: 5
Words: 9,129
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Just another day at Family Video for Steve Harrington; renting movies, getting a film education, and helping The Party navigate life after Starcourt. Dramedy SERIES. Edit: Chapter 5: Rambo to the Max- Lucas skips school to visit Steve after and Max break up, again.

1. The Search for Spock

Doing Time at Family Video

Steve Harrington leaned on the counter, at Family Video, in just the same manner he had done at Scoops Ahoy. It was a resigned and somewhat apathetic posture. It matched his attitude about his job in general. Moving from the Mind Flayer destroyed Starcourt to a small and isolated strip mall was not his idea of an improvement.

He was thankful to Robin for helping him get the job; even more thankful that he was no longer in that lame Scoops Ahoy uniform. There was a time when Steve 'The Hair' Harrington would not have been caught dead in a ridiculous get up like that. It had been enough of a hit to his ego to have put the uniform on much less being seeing by the ladies, former classmates, and snot nosed kids. It was almost too much to bear. But those days were gone and he was either better or worse for it depending on whom you asked. Now, he could wear what he wanted. At least it felt that way. A Family Video polo shirt and slacks was a far cry from a gloried toddler outfit. He shook his head to clear it of the Scoops Ahoy rabbit hole he was headed down and went to walk the shelves.

He had learned a lot in the few weeks he'd been on the job. Movie categories such as comedy (his favorite), action (he liked that too), Drama (avoided like the plague), mystery/suspense (ok in a pinch), and Sci-Fi(dweeby nerd stuff) were invading his dreams. And, don't get him started on Classics, Documentaries, or Foreign films (ugh!)

As he approached the small New Release section, it was Eddie Murphy's *Beverly Hills Cop* that jumped out at him. Saturday Night Live was required viewing for him. He smiled remembering Murphy's SNL characters such as Mr Robinson's Neighborhood, Gumby, and James Brown in the hot tub!

His reverie was disturbed by a commotion at the door. He turn to see Mike, Dustin, and Lucas all trying to get in at the same time. Dipshit triplets. He was not annoyed in the least.

"What's up, Nerd Patrol?" Steve said with a broad smile. "Something

on you mind?"

The three teens rushed at him, eyes seemingly crazed with determination. It hit him what they were after when they were half way across the lobby floor. They had their target acquired. He turn the wall, with cheetah like reflexes, and removed a plastic case from behind a Styrofoam filled display box. He shoved into the back of his pants. Stepping aside, the three clowns almost collided with the shelving. Mike, the tallest and gangliest, got his hands to the shelf first.

"Fuck!" Mike exclaimed, pulling the display box down and seeing no videotape behind it.

"Son of a Bitch!" Dustin added, as his shoulders slumped and mouth gaped.

Lucas simply frowned.

"Problem boys?" Steve asked, mischievously.

"Yeah, there's a problem, Steve," Dustin replied, disappointingly. "Where the hell is *The Search for Spock*? You said you would hold it for us?"

Steve scrunched up his face in disgust. "You mean that *Star Wars* movie? Didn't you see it in the theater?"

Lucas rolled his eyes. "Of course we saw in the theater! That's why we want to see it again."

"It's Star Trek, Steve," Dustin said, shaking his head. "Star Trek 3! Spock is alive!"

Steve was nonplussed by their excitement. "I'm pretty sure you nerds said it was a weak sequel the other one. What about *Beverly Hills Cop* or *Fletch* or *Sixteen Candles*? All new, boys. I've stashed a couple behind the counter."

All three stared dumbly at him.

"*Alien*? Nothing like a face sucking alien gestating in your stomach

and ripping its way out."

"You're kidding, right?" Mike said, starring disbelievingly at Steve.

Steve immediately realized his error and could not believe he had even said it. For a moment, he was lost in the present, with his friends, not the brutal past where real monsters killed without mercy. All four were silent for a time.

"*Beverly Hills Cop* is Rated R, Lame Brain. So is *Alien*," Dustin said, breaking the tension. "You trying to corrupt us?"

"Absolutely," Steve shot back, thankful for the lifeline. "You clowns needs broaden your horizons."

"Says the guys who called the Ewoks Teddy Bears," Dustin said. "Yeah, Robin told us. Teddy Bears, my ass. They were supposed to be Wookiees but Lucas didn't want to spring for more Chewie, so we got…bear cubs."

"Nice try, Dickweed," Steve answered. "The Hair knows."

"I'm not watching *Sixteen Candles*," Lucas interjected. "At least not without Max. It just wouldn't be right."

"No one's watching that," Mike said turning to Steve. "I saw Steve reach for something when we came in? What was it?"

Steve remained cool. "Better step back, Bean Pole. I don't have to explain my job to you."

"I think he switched the movie," Mike pressed. "He's hiding it from us."

Steve's face became a mask of incredulity. "What do I care if you guys want to watch Star Trek III: Return of the Zombie Vulcan?"

Mike looked to Dustin who looked to Lucas who looked back to Steve.

"Zombie Vulcan?" Lucas asked in surprise.

"Yeah," Steve replied, shifting his weight nervously. "The pointy eared dude is undead, right? A Zombie."

Dustin smirked, nodding his head in approval. "Steve Harrington knows what a Vulcan is!"

"I wouldn't go that far," Mike said raising his eyebrows, doubtfully. "Pointy ears are everything."

Another car door slammed outside and Steve saw a family of four coming to the door. He made for the counter without a word to the three teens.

"Welcome to Fam-" Steve started in greeting.

"HOLY SHIT! YOU BASTARD!" Dustin bellowed as he followed Steve to the counter. "You had it the whole time!"

Dustin followed Steve behind the counter and retrieved the box from his pants. He exited the counter area wordlessly, passing the family, frozen in their tracks by his outburst, and returned to his friends.

Steve's face reddened as he apologized and offered the family a free rental. When they went to make their selection, Steve returned to the kids.

"What the fuck was that?" Steve barked at Dustin, his brow furrowed in frustration.

"That was me finding you out," Dustin retorted, laughing, thinking it was all still a joke.

"You didn't give me time to give it you before you started cursing. Loudly."

"You were hiding it," Mike offered weakly.

"No shit, Sherlock," Steve said. "Did you really think I was gonna keep it from you?"

"…"

"That's what I thought. Now don't do that shit in my store ever again. You clowns can pay for this one for my trouble."

He herded them to the counter, took their money, and sent them on their way, duly chastised. He leaned on the counter again, watching as the trio hopped their bikes and sped off toward, he supposed, Mike's house.

What an idiot he had been to mention *Alien*. After all they been through. After all they had seen. After everyone who had died. How could he have forgotten, even for a moment, Barb, Bob, and the Chief? There were more of course, many more in most recent encounter. Fucking Flayer. Fucking Russians. But that was over too, he supposed…until the next time. Until then, it's still his job to watch after those kids and tell customer of the evils of the Disney's *Oliver and Company*.

2. Open Mike Night

Chapter 2: Open Mike Night

Steve Harrington walked the shelves of Family Video on a Thursday night in late August. The sun was down, but the heat was still on. He was thankful that his bosses kept the store air conditioned. He was in the Drama section glancing over the titles when one jumped off the shelf. Not because he wanted it to, but because Robin said his film education had begun. She had given three films to choose from, thankfully all released within his lifetime. He knew it was petty, but he just wasn't interested in movies from before he was born. Robin said she would cure him of that nonsense; 'but a baby has to walk before they can run', were her exact words, as she had patted his cheek in condescension. The three films were *Gandhi* (staring at him peacefully through wiry round glasses), *Ordinary People* (he'd had enough of that at home), and *The Godfather* (it doesn't look good for that cat).

Robin had made him an offer he couldn't refuse and she was surprised that he knew that it was reference from The Godfather. Of the three, the mafia film was the once that sounded more to his taste, but he didn't want to be obvious and, for some reason, he wanted to impress his best friend. She told him that each of the films were relatively recent Oscar winners. This meant nothing to him and she had nearly slapped him again for his ignorance. She explained that the Academy Awards were held each year and the 'best' films, among other things, were announced. It was a pretty big deal, apparently. She started telling him how the Academy worked and he just turned his back and walked away.

Returning to the present, he now had a decision to make: Present day drama in suburbia or historical drama in India. His first thought was that Gandhi was so far away and so long ago. But, he could not stand the idea of family grief and alienation in the upper middle class. He knew that situation well enough. India it was! Robin would be pleased that Steve was going to learn more about passive resistance. He was not sure he would, though.

As he removed the case from behind the display box, he heard the

jingle of the door chime. As he headed back to the counter, he frowned at the site of Mike Wheeler standing just inside the door. The tall gangly kid looked more like a cast off from the Adams Family than a fun loving teenager. But that was just it. Mike wasn't a fun loving teenager. He also wasn't Steve's favorite Party member. The fact that he was alone did not bode well for either of them.

As he approached the desk and the boy, he noticed Wheeler's bike was on its side just beyond the doorway. Not good at all.

It wasn't raining, but the kid's shoulders hung low and his messy black curls seemed to shine. Sweat probably. He wore a yellow windbreaker and a blue Superman t-shirt. His blue jeans looked stapled to his hips, aided by the large brown leather belt. His legs were slightly apart, and his long arms hung loosely at his sides. Wheeler had two facial expressions. Perhaps, three. At the moment he was wearing the steely-eyed gaze of brooding/angry Mike. If Steve didn't know better, the kid had just thrown open the doors of a saloon and was looking for a duel. See? Steve knew his film genres. He had already jumped from Horror to Western. He was hoping this was not about to be some weird combination.

"What's up, Wheeler?" Steve greeted amiably, raising the case in his hand a little higher. "Can you believe it? Robin wants me to watch *Gandhi*.

Mike did not respond as Steve rounded the counter and placed the case in a supply drawer.

Steve leaned on the counter. "What can I do you for? Gandhi not your thing? Mine either. What we do for our friends, right?"

"Kingsley is pretty good in it," Mike said softly.

Steve didn't see Mike's lips move but he heard what he said. Grunting teens. He was done with it already.

"Uh, thanks," Steve replied. "I think. That gives me some hope. What's up, Mike? You like crap. Like you want to fight someone. Sorry, but I don't want to fight."

"It's not like that," Mike said again. "I'm just not in the best mood. No one is answering their radios."

Revelation dawned in Steve's mind. "No one? Henderson always answers his radio."

"Not when he's talking to Suzie," Mike answered.

"Sinclair?" Steve asked.

"He and Max are back together this week," Mike droned.

"What about Will," Steve offered. "No girlfriend for him right?"

"When I said no one was answering," Mike replied, an edge entering his voice. "That's what I meant."

Harrington raised his hands in surrender, before going on the offensive, again. "Is that why your bike is lying on the sidewalk?"

Mike turned, ever so slowly and regarded the bike. "Yeah, I guess it is."

"I don't usually see you guys treating your bikes like that?" Steve said. "Something must really be shitty? What is it?"

"No one is answering their radios," Mike repeated, looking at Steve like he was dense or something.

Steve rubbed his chin as if in thought. "You mean Supergirl, right? Eleven?"

Mike tilted his head at Steve and narrowed his eyes. "I said everyone, didn't I?"

Harrington's geniality dissipated and his face shifted to a harder, less patient countenance. "What are you doing here, Dipshit?"

"Renting a movie," Mike continued, sullenly.

"What movie is that?" Steve asked, skeptically. "*E.T.*?"

"*Porky's*" Wheeler said, coldly, meeting Steve's eyes.

Harrington's eyebrows went up and he shook his head in mirthful disbelief. "You must mean *Charlotte's Web*? That's the only film with a pig element that you'll be renting."

Steve could see the younger boy's temperature rising. From what he had heard and seen, it wasn't that hard to do. He didn't want to fight with the kid and certainly didn't want to cause another scene in the store. Mike was one of his kids regardless of their inability to connect on any other level that killing extra dimensional monsters. They had shared trauma. It was a unique brotherhood. Intentionally making him mad didn't seem right.

"Okay, fine," Mike sneered. "*Police Academy*."

"You're going the wrong way, Mike," Steve said. "You know I can't rent you that stuff. Even if I wanted to. It could cost me my job. I can see you're upset. I know you're missing El and Will and Mrs. Byers and…well, I'm not sure how you feel about the Hopper. But's it a lot, Man. It's a whole chunk out of your…our lives that's gone."

"Is that supposed to cheer me up?" Mike said, some of the tension bleeding from his voice. "Not the best pep talk I've ever heard."

Steve smiled genuinely and stood up, grabbing a spray bottle and a roll of paper towels from under the counter. He came to meet Mike out in front. If this were Dustin, he would throw and arm around his shoulders. It wasn't.

"Walk with me," Steve said. "Gotta clean the shelves."

Mike didn't move immediately, but soon lumbered behind.

"This is what you do for money?" Mike said, as he watched Steve clear a shelf of video cases and display boxes, setting the stack on the ground. Steve then examined the shelf, which was about 4 feet long and gave three quick sprays of the cleaning solution. Tearing off a couple of paper towels he wiped down the bottom of the shelf and the back, clearing whatever dust, garbage or other debris had been left behind.

"The shameful glory," Steve replied, as he replaced the stack on the

clean shelf and proceeded to the next. "You'll see soon enough, Bean Pole. It's a step up from the humiliation of *Scoops Ahoy*."

"Clearly," Mike mumbled. "Want some help?"

Steve looked at Mike, surprise clear on his face. "You want to help me with this shit work?"

"Sure," Mike replied, suddenly unsure why he has offered. "Better than sitting at home…alone."

"Alone?" Steve said. "No Nancy or Holly or mom and dad?"

"Unfortunately," Mike answered somberly. "They're all home."

"Damn. That sucks. I totally know what you mean, though."

"Can we not talk about it," Mike said, moving to the next display bay. He cleared all five shelves and created the stacks just as Steve had done. "No family, friends, or girlfriends."

"What about movies?" Steve offered. "What's your favorite movie?"

Mike sprayed all five shelved and tore paper towels from the role. As he started wiping down the top shelf, he looked down at Steve who was working the bottom shelf next to him. "*Star Wars*, I guess."

"You guess?" Steve shot back. "Two years ago it would have been *Star Wars*, Man!"

"Two years is a long time," Mike mumbled. "A lot has happened. A lot of bullshit."

Steve stood, having replaced the stack on the bottom shelf.

"You can say that again," Harrington agreed. "But we're talking about *Star Wars*. Why is it your favorite?"

"I see what you're trying to do…" Mike said, trailing off.

"Then, do it, Dipstick," Steve admonished, trying to keep the mood as light as possible.

The faintest hint of a smile tugged at the edge of Mike's mouth. "Well, it has kick ass space battles."

"Nice," Steve said. "What else? And you better not say lazer swords."

"Lightsabers," Mike corrected, gently.

"Whatever," Steve said, dismissively.

"Lightsabers are cool, but the only lightsaber fight was between Darth Vader and Obi-Wan Kenobi. It was a cool scene, but the sword fighting was pretty lame. The best thing about Star Wars is Han Solo. Harrison Ford. And, the Millennium Falcon. Now, that's a cool ship."

Steve smiled as continued cleaning. "Yeah, Indiana Jones was pretty cool in that one."

Mike stopped the spraying he was doing and lightly kicked Steve's shoe. "*Star Wars* came before *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. I think you meant to say that Han Solo was cool in Raiders."

"To quote a moody, early teen I know: What I said is what I mean," Steve said with a mischievous grin.

"That's not what I said," Mike argued lightly.

"Close enough, Dipshit," Steve retorted. "Indian Jones would kick Han Slow-low's ass."

"Bold statement, Babysitter," Mike shot back. "Should we take it to The Party?"

"Touché'," Steve said, laughing. "Sure, next time you Chuckleheads are in here, well ask."

"Just to be sure," Mike inquired, tentatively. "You just think Indy would win in a fight? You still like Han Solo, right?"

Steve regarded the younger man, hearing something serious in the question.

"Not really sure, Mike," Steve answered truthfully. "What's it to you?"

Mike turned back to the shelf and started continued wiping a section he had already completed. "It's nothing. Stupid, really."

"I can guarantee it is not more stupid than me wearing that sailor suit."

"You're kinda hung up on the sailor suit, aren't you?" Mike said.

"Never mind. Bottom line: whatever it is you have to say, it's not stupid."

Mike turned from where her was attempting to wear a hole in the particle board and looked at Steve. "You're kind of like him."

Steve was momentarily frozen by the comment. If he followed the conversation, the kid must mean. The character of Han Solo. But Wheeler' body language could mean someone else. But who? Hopper? Shit! What was he gonna do if Mike freakin' Wheeler, the Chief's daughter's boyfriend started talking about the Chief himself. The one member of the family that didn't survive Starcourt.

The one member of The Party who had a strained relationship with the Hopper.

"Who?" Steve asked, trying to sound casual.

"Solo," Mike said, a little apprehensively. "You've got the swagger, or used to. You can, er, kick ass and get your ass equally kicked. You can be funny sometimes, but…uh…mostly just an asshole. Yeah, that's pretty much Han Solo; a brave, dangerous asshole, who's funny sometimes."

So relieved that Mike wasn't talking about Hopper, he almost missed that that Wheeler had paid him a compliment. A backhanded compliment, but a compliment just the same. That fact that Mike had compared him to Han Solo meant a lot. But would likely mean more once he told Robin about it.

"Thanks, Mike," Harrington said with a smirk. "I think."

"I've never really talked to you about everything," Mike said, continuing his awkward demeanor. "You've been around, but we've

never been one on one. We're Family, you know, and we've never talked."

"I cannot argue with that, Wheeler."

Mike shook his head. "Don't call me Wheeler. Dipshit is better than Wheeler. Or Mike."

"You got it, Dipshit," Steve said, punching Mike in the arm. "Whenever you want to talk, let me know. About everything, that is. Otherwise, you'll find me right here."

Mike nodded his acceptance and continued to clean the next three bays of shelves. Steve left and came back as customers needed to check out. They cleaned in peaceful silence.

Mike had been in the store for almost two hours, when Steve announced that he needed to close up. Mike would have to leave. He opened the door to leave and turn back to Harrington, who leaned on the counter.

"One more thing, Steve," he added, staring at his shuffling feet.

"What that?"

"For what it's worth," Mike said, confidence in his previous apprehensive voice. "I never hated The Chief. I didn't wanted him to die. We…"

"I get it, Mike," Steve said with genuine sympathy. "I wasn't that close with him either. But, he acted like more of a dad than mine."

Mike stood in the doorway and absorbed what Steve had shared. He felt exactly the same. Exactly. He was compelled to go back to the counter and offer his hand. Weird or not, there it was. He met Steve's eyes while swallowing a swell of emotion. Steve took his hand and the shook, firmly.

"Let me know how *Gandhi* goes," Mike said.

"I will do absolutely do that," Steve replied. "I'll need another perspective after Robin tried to school."

"Talk to you later, Steve," Mike said as he exited the store. "But don't count on me doing your work for you next time."

"Later, Shithead," Steve shot back. "Just remember it was your idea."

3. It's a Wonderful Life

Chapter 3

A Wonderful Life

It was a busy December night at Family video and Steve was just short of literally beating his head against the counter when Robin emerged from the small office behind him. She could see that his near vacant stare was just one 'Do you have *A Christmas Story*?' away from a tirade, unleashed on adult or child, that might get him fired. There were no customers at the counter, but she could see a mother and two young boys approaching.

"You can take a break, Dingus," she said, patting him on the back. "Deep breaths. *Deep Breaths*."

He turned to her, thanks perceptible in his hooded eyes and almost imperceptible nod and smile. She watched as he grabbed his coat and lumbered out the front door.

It was snowing heavy flakes when Steve exited the store, but they weren't sticking. As he breathed in the cold, winter air, he began to revive a bit. The cold on his cheeks and in his lungs brought a smile to his face. It might not last long; the cold has a way of becoming unwelcome the longer you stay in it. However, for the moment, he rested against the edge of building watching the flakes hit the pavement and dissolve into slush.

His attention was drawn to a set of headlights pulling into the lot, the sound of the engine registering memories that he had not successfully buried over the last few months. As the car came closer and the puke green Pinto appeared behind the lights, Steve's peaceful smile broke into a grin.

Joyce Byers waved excitedly as she pulled into a spot three cars away. He could hear the doors creak as El and Will burst from their cramped quarters. Steve had already been moving toward them when El surprised him by jumping into his arms for a bear hug.

"Whoa!" Steve exclaimed, releasing the hug and looking into her adorable brown eyes all abuzz with excitement. He hugged Joyce and Will as well. "What an awesome surprise! I thought you weren't supposed to arrive until tomorrow!"

"You try stopping with these two kids bouncing around the inside of an already too small car chanting 'Hawkins! Hawkins! We want Mike! We Want Mike! And Dustin and Lucas and Max and Robin and…

Joyce gestured toward him as if presenting a prize. "Steve!"

He grinned again. Nothing made the madness of renting movies fade into nothingness like a visit from The Family, far or near. El and Will continued smiling, hands jammed into their coats, teeth beginning to chatter.

"I am honored," Steve said, magnanimously. "Should we go inside? It's crazy cold out here."

Will turned to his mother, shaking with cold and a new found frenzy. "Mom, do you think they have *A Christmas Story*?"

Steve's magnanimity crumpled only a little at the mention of the film that should never be mentioned.

"Ask Robin," Steve said with a wink. "She'll be jazzed to see you and might have a surprise."

Joyce and Will turned and headed to the door. Steve made to join them, but El stood her ground. Steve hesitated, and spying El's desire to talk told Joyce they would be in in a couple minutes.

"Where's Mike?" Steve opened. "I was sure that Beanpole would be attached to your hip."

"Attached?" El said, touching her side and looking at her belt.

"I meant that I thought Mike would be with you if he knew you were here."

El smiled her glorious smile and laughed a little under her breath. She punched him in the arm. "I know what you meant, Hair-ington!

Attached at the hip. You think I haven't been told that one so many times?

Steve laughed out loud and rubbed his arm where she had hit him.

"Not enough room in the car," El explained. "Something about 'eating knees'. He stayed home."

"Home?" Steve replied, perplexed. "Are you staying with the Wheeler's?"

"No," El said, disappointingly. "We are in a hotel. But we are having a party at their house tomorrow. We stopped by there tonight. Joyce said no Mike at the hotel."

"Probably a good idea unless the rest of the clowns are there, too."

"Are you coming to the party tomorrow?" El asked as if it was a forgone conclusion. "We need a babysitter."

"Like hell you do," Steve said, smirking. "But I wouldn't miss it."

She smiled, nodding in approval, twisting side to side, folding her arms tighter. "Good."

"So, how's Indianapolis?" he said. "School?"

"School's fine," she said. "Will helps a lot. So does Jonathan when he's around. I don't like needing that much help."

Mildly surprised by the confession, Steve responded in kind. "I kind of know what you mean. You know I'm not in school anymore, but there is still a lot to learn working in this store. Robin has to help me all the time. It's so annoying!"

"I could do this job, Steve," El chided. "You just need to watch more movies. Maybe spend a year in cabin in the woods with nothing but books and TV."

Steve laughed again. "I had no idea you had gotten so good at joking around. I like it."

"A lot of movies, My Man?" she said with a straight face.

Steve tried not to laugh and failed and El fell into the laughter with him.

"Speaking of movies, are you going to watch that movie Will asked about?" Steven inquired, testing the waters.

El wrinkled her nose and shook her head. "Watched it last year in the theater. Stupid."

"Are you kidding me?" Steve, said in disbelief. He raised his hand for a high five and she slapped it. "So stupid!"

"But everyone else seems to think it is so good," El said with a shrug. "Will would probably shoot his eye out."

Steve could not believe his ears. He leaned backward bending his knees and laughed some more. He was so thankful to have a kindred spirit when it came to 'Ralphie'. "You are probably right. Will *would* shoot his eye out. How did you remember that stuff? How many times have you seen it?"

"It is kind of a new movie, Steve," El said. "Just saw it once."

"Amazing, El," he said, nodding. "I'm hearing people quoting it all day long and there are not enough copies in the store to meet the demand. What ever happened to loving *It's a Wonderful Life*?"

El eyed him, skeptically. "The Hair doesn't like old movies."

"Says who?" Steve demurred. "I like plenty of old movies."

El stared him down. "Friends don't lie, Steve."

He raised his hands in surrender. "Okay, I don't like old movies, but I do like a couple of them and *It's a Wonderful Life* is one."

"Why?" She asked, simply.

"Why what?" he replied.

"Why do you like George Bailey so much?" she answered folding her arms and regarding him closely."

"George is it?" Steve jibed. "Are you two good friends?"

El shook her head of brown locks and squinted in recognition of his joke. "I cannot be friends with a movie character, Steve. But I have seen that movie at least 10 times. I love George Bailey!"

Steve smiled genuinely. "Absolutely. There is a lot to love. But George made some mistakes, didn't he?"

El nodded solemnly, but didn't allow it curb her enthusiasm. "He did. But he was given a second chance. Kind of like Old Ebenezer."

"Old…who?" Steve replied, searching his memory for the reference.

"Scrooge!" she almost yelled. "You are killing me, Hair-ington!"

"You are right about that," Steve agreed, happily. "They both got a chance to make their wrongs right."

"They also got a chance to see what it would have been like if their lives were Upside Down."

Steve's mirth ebbed at that. He was thankful that he had not stepped into that pitfall, but if El was bringing it up, he could hang. "They did. Seeing their lives liked that was enough to make them change."

"Do you think our lives will ever change, Steve?" she asked, honestly.

He looked into the mixture of innocent and pain-filled eyes. He had no words. The levity of the conversation had evaporated and Supergirl was asking him how it was all going to turn out.

Breaking eye contact, he looked into the store and caught Joyce's eye. She raised the movie case into the air. She waived him in. He raised one finger to let her know they wouldn't be much longer.

"Joyce wants us to come in," Steve said, distractedly. "I think my break is over, too."

El frowned in disappointment, sadness creeping over the edges of her strong veneer. "Do not do this to me, Steve. The change is already too much. My dad did not get a second chance."

Steve was uncomfortably in awe of the girl in front of him. Shifting from frivolous nonsense to heartbreaking reality in a single beat. He regarded her thoughtfully and then pulled her into his own bear hug.

"It's not fair, El," he said as he hugged her. "It's just not fair. He was good. Really good. He deserved more and so do you.

He broke the hug and saw that she was fighting tears. "Don't fight this one, El. Just let them come. Of the many things Robin has taught me, a big one is that it is okay to cry. And you have a truckload of unfair to cry about."

He hugged her again. He could feel the trembling and shaking that came with heartsick tears. Looking up he saw Joyce exit the store before she realized that was happening. She approached quietly and gently rubbed El's back.

"Just let it out, Honey," Joyce whispered, as if her parental experience knew that coming back to Hawkins would break this dam all over again.

"You know what this means, right El?" Steve said, softly.

El looked up and wiped her eyes, curiosity replacing sadness for the moment. "What does it mean, Steve?"

"It means that while everyone else is shooting their eyes out, you and I can say Merry Christmas to that Old Building and Loan."

El laughed a shaky laugh which put her back into another round of sobs. "M-Mike, too?"

"Of course," Steve replied. "Whichever of you little sh-guys wants to watch, I'll bring the movie and another TV and VCR if I have to."

"I would like that," El said with a croaky voice.

"Me too," Steve said, seeing Robin through the store window waiving

him to assist with a line of customers. "I have to get back to work, but I can't wait to hang with you guys tomorrow night.

Steve looked at El again and smiled conspiratorially. He leaned to her ear and whispered:

"Hawkins is no Pottersville. It's our job to keep it that way."

He stood up straight, said his goodbyes, and went back to work.

4. Halloween

Halloween

It was Halloween night, 1985, and Steve Harrington was stuck behind the cash register at Family Video taking money and answering stupid questions.

Do you have any copies of *Halloween*?

Is Freddy Kreuger a real person?

What does Jason look like behind that hockey mask?

Have you seen *American Werewolf in London*? The effect of the wolf snout coming out that guy's mouth is totally epic!

"I'm looking for the *Addams Family*?" said the teen girl before him, wearing a knee length black dress with a stiff white collar, black stockings, and black shoes. It he didn't know better it looked like a school uniform, if the school were run by Nuns or Witches. When his eyes rose to her face, he was simultaneously turned off and turned on. She was pale, but her eye shadow and lashes made her hazel eyes penetrate his soul. Well, at least, made it uncomfortable to look away. Her black hair was braided tightly and hung perfectly even just below her collar bone, if it were visible "You know, the old TV show?"

"Vaguely," he said, dreamily. "Try the TV section. No, try the special Halloween section over by new releases."

"Stop staring, asshole," she said abrasively, as she turned back toward the main body of the store.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied under his breath.

"Do you have to be so damn obvious?" Robin said, sidling up next to him, knocking shoulders.

"Are you saying she wasn't creepy hot?" Steve managed, returning from whatever graveyard fantasy had been formulating his brain.

"That is Miranda Hopkins, Dingus," Robin said, waving a hand slowly in front of his face. "Junior this year. Banish the thought."

"Since when did she go Goth?" Steve asked, confusion evident in his knitted brow.

"You are hopeless, Harrington," his friend declared, patting his cheeks in friendly condescension. She had taken doing that lately. He endured it, but would put an end to it eventually. "She didn't 'Go Goth'. It's Halloween night and she is in costume. Clearly, she loves creepy clever classic TV shows."

Steve rolled his eyes. "With which, of course, you are intimately familiar?"

"I've seen enough to be dangerous," she said, smiling bashfully and leaning over the counter to check on Miranda. "Nothing wrong with a little harmless flirting, right?"

"Now whose being obvious," Steve teased. "Junior remember."

"Just talk," she replied and exited the counter area. "I need a closer look. That dress is hugging all right spots."

Steve assisted the next few customers and was thankful that the idiocy had tapered off, for the moment at least, and the transactions were pleasantly...transactional.

When he looked up, he saw The Party. But, it wasn't The Party. They looked wrong. Mike was wearing a jean jacket over a white thermal, holey jeans with a flannel shirt wrapped around waist, and black driving gloves with the fingers cut out. A bubble gum cigarette hung from his lips. Next to him was Lucas, in a Navy blue sweat suit and white tennis shoes. Followed by...Max? Her transformation was the most striking. She wore black head to toe; black t-shirt covered by black button down sweater and a long black skirt over black leggings. Black boots. More than all of that, Max's majestic wavy red locks had been dyed black. Or, was it a wig? Unlike the previous creepy school girl, Max was not going for alluring at all. Still not Goth, but damn depressing. On the end was Henderson, the most recognizable of the bunch in a light blue button down shirt, khakis, and a pair of

sunglasses he didn't need. Stepping out from behind Dustin was Erica. She was not in costume so far as he could tell. It was another variation of the jumper she was wearing at Starcourt. The girl loved jumpers and didn't care what anyone thought. He knew they were in costume, but try as he might he could not place them.

"No way," Robin said, surprise and awe on her face as she approached The Party. "You guys look fantastic. I heard The Party went all out for Halloween, but I wasn't expecting this level of detail. I have to get a picture."

Robin disappeared into the office to find a camera while Steve wracked his brain again for who they were supposed to be.

"You don't have a clue, do you, Steve?" Dustin said, breaking the silence as he was like to do. "This is truly pathetic. We have to do something Steve will know, they said. We can't go too indie, they said. He won't get it."

"That's what I said," Lucas added. "Too far from the mainstream and the Hair gets lost."

"Come on, Steve," Max said, so quietly he almost couldn't hear her. "I bet on you this time. Don't let me down."

Dustin stepped forward and went to Mike at the front of the lineup. He pointed to Mike's jean jacket. "Criminal." He pointed to Lucas. "Jock." Max: "Basket Case." Finally, taking off his glasses, he pointed to himself: "Brain. Ring any bells, Space Case?"

After a moment of thought, Steve starting nodding like he had it, but then shook his head vigorously. "Yeah, No clue."

Robin appeared with the camera just in time to hear Erica boom: "*Breakfast Club*, Fool!"

Understanding dawned on Steve like a rising sun: slowly. But there was one show TV show that he never missed. That was The A-Team. Erica had definitely been practicing her Mr. T impression. Or, perhaps, she wasn't. That made her all the more scary.

"Oh yeah, *The Breakfast Club*," Steve said. "I saw that one. Pretty

Good. Great song, too. Simple Minds, right?"

The dour Max smiled and nodded minutely.

Dustin grinned, putting the sunglasses back on.

"Right," Mike replied.

As Robin looked through the camera eye piece, she noticed that someone was missing. Two people, in fact. She brought the camera down and frowned.

"You're missing your Princess," she said, glumly. "And the other Brain."

Everyone looked at Mike, who from his suddenly mournful countenance, had no desire to talk about it.

Max, Lucas, and Ercia faded into the store while Mike and Dustin stayed put.

"It's definitely not the same without El and Will," Dustin said. "But they are going to send pictures of the Princess and Brain so we can still...you know…be The Party."

Steve felt for the kids. Three years ago it only been the four boys. Add in two girls, one with superpowers, another with mad gaming skills, then take away the powers and one of the boys and things just aren't the same. He hoped it would not fall apart completely.

"That's good, Henderson," Steve affirmed. "Maybe you should send some pictures to them. I bet Jonathan could do some of his photographic magic and get you all in one shot."

"Great idea, Steve," Dustin said, excited by the prospect. "I'll talk to Will about it tonight."

Mike seemed to perk up a bit at the idea. A smile tugged at the edge of his mouth. "What if we posed like the movie poster and Will and El did the same. I bet Jonathan could mock up a poster for us."

Robin had retreated behind the counter assisting customers. She did

this for Steve when the Family stopped in. However, she was a member of the Family now and he would need to account for that.

"I bet he could," Steve agreed.

Mike took that moment to melt into the store to find his friends.

"So, how goes it, Henderson?" Steve asked.

"Same as yesterday," Dustin answered. "Sucky."

"Doesn't have to suck," Steve tried, but he wasn't feeling a pep talk. "How's Suzy?"

"She's fine," Dustin replied. "She wants me to go to church."

"Church?" Steve said, skeptically. "Why?"

"We can talk about it later, but basically it the only way her parents would approve of us being together."

"You're fourteen, dude," Steve said. "She lives in another state. This sounds way more serious than you should be thinking about. Why do you care if her parents approve?"

"I love her," Dustin said, matter of fact, shrugging his shoulder.

Steve already had sad sack Mike pining over El, the volatile Max and Lucas, and now wide-eyed Dustin pining as well. Maybe he and Mike could bond over this? Maybe he should encourage Dustin to look locally for a girlfriend. Maybe he should tell himself to shut up. The kid seems happy. Don't mess with what's not broken.

"Love her, then." Steve replied. "But don't do something like church if it's only for her. It's not gonna end well."

"I hear you, Steve," Dustin said, thoughtfully. "I'm not opposed to church. I've been a few times. No harm checking it out."

Steve smiled in understanding. "Absolutely no harm in checking it out. Keep me posted."

"Will do," Dustin replied.

"Are you guys getting a movie?" Steve asked.

"Not sure. We still have some trick or treating to do. Why?"

"I've got *Poltergeist* behind the counter," Steve whispered. "I was going to watch it tonight, but I'm not sure I'm in the mood."

"R-Rated again, Steve," Dustin said, dejectedly. "Plus, it's a school night."

Steve ran a hand through his hair. "Listen to me, Henderson. I wasn't going do this, but I did. I picked three nerd movies I was sure you guys would like. Forget Poltergeist. What I told you I had *KRULL? Legend? The Dark Crystal?*"

"I've seen them all, but *Krull* would be sweet! Let me check with the guys."

"Take your time."

Dustin went to find the Party and Steve returned to his spot behind the counter which was thankfully devoid of customers. He leaned over, resting his elbows on the counter next to Robin.

"So, how did it go with *Miranda*?" Steve asked, mischievously, drawing out the name.

Robin rolled and hooded her eyes simultaneously. "She had the nerve to say that little Wednesday Addams was better that her Dad, Gomez. When I challenged her, subtly, she hardened and dropped a B word on me."

"Brassy?" Steve asked with a smirk.

Her exact words were 'Step off, Bitch.' Never figured her for a mean girl, but you never know."

"What do you mean you never figured...She was a sophomore and you were a senior?"

"Tammy wasn't the only girl on my radar, Dingus."

"Maybe she should have been is all I'm saying. Don't make me revive the You Suck board. Steee-rike one!"

"Got me there. But let's not. We don't suck. You don't suck. I don't suck. We don't suck together."

"Absolutely no sucking," Steve said and burst into laughter. Robin joined in.

Steve basked in the moment of comraderie with his best friend with the kids a mere stone's throw away. Perhaps Halloween at Family video was not that bad after all.

5. Rambo to the Max

*A/N: * This chapter discusses some elements of racial prejudice. I am not Black and cannot begin to understand the African American experience. I sought a reason Lucas might break up with Max rather than her repeatedly dumping him. I do not wish to offend anyone and hope the story rings true.*

**I like Lucas and feel he is the leader behind the leader we see in Mike. The lead together but Lucas is more the tactician. LO*

Chapter 5: Rambo to the Max

The store was dead on a Tuesday morning and Steve Harrington aimed to misbehave. After going through the opening process, he took a movie he had saved from the night before and popped it into the VCR attached to TV hanging from a stand in the corner of the ceiling behind the counter. He fast forwarded past the FBI warning and a couple of previews as the music rose and a lone man walked down a gravel path. As he walked, the path led to a few small houses on a large lake. The man kept moving down to one of the houses and two women hanging laundry on a clothesline. Steve watched as John Rambo introduced himself and got the bad news the his friend, a brother in arms, in Vietnam, was dead. Rambo leaves the lakeside sanctuary and is back on the road. Within minutes of entering the mountain town of Holidayland, he approached by the local Sheriff.

'You know, wearing that flag on that jacket, looking the way you do, you're asking for trouble around here, friend.'

"Oh shit," said a voice from behind Steve, causing him to jump out of his skin. "That's where it starts. He should not have said that."

Whirling around, he saw Lucas Sinclair leaning standing at the counter. "What the Hell, Sinclair?"

"I'm just saying the Sheriff should have been nicer," Lucas continued. "Would've saved lives. Hopper would have invited John over to Patty's for coffee."

"Stop talking, Lucas," Steve said, still trying to figure out how someone entered the store without him knowing. And, well, Lucas. "What are you doing here? Shouldn't you be in school?"

"I'd much rather talk about Rambo," Lucas dodged. "Doubling down on idiocy only make things worse as Dennehy found out."

"Dennehy?" Steve asked, still nonplussed by Sinclair's arrival and inability to get the kid to be quiet.

"Yeah, Brian Dennehy," Lucas said. "He plays the Sheriff. Definitely, a bad dude. Why would you be treating Veterans like that? Assuming they are trouble?"

Steve knew that Lucas should be in school and his presence here meant something was wrong. Lucas was not the type to skip school. He was a pretty straight-laced kid. He thought that about all of them; probably because they were nerds, but Sinclair seemed to have the best home life of all the Party, which didn't mean he was an angel, but, from what Steve had gathered over the last couple of years, he followed the rules and didn't like to start trouble. So, what was causing this 'good kid' to skip school?

"Good question," Steve replied, genially, dropping the shocked accusations. "I know the Vietnam vets were treated horribly on their return from war. People are strange. Seems they didn't know what to do with their feelings about the government's involvement in a foreign dispute. Stopping communism isn't easy. But to turn on the soldiers; the men and women just doing their duty, isn't right."

"Uh," Lucas started, momentarily stunned by Steve's comment. "Yeah. That's right."

Steve flashed a satisfied grin. "What? Did you think I graduated high school learning nothing?"

Lucas shrugged, smiling awkwardly. "I have no clue what The Hair knows. You surprised me that's all."

"Lucas," Steve said, pointing his hand back and forth between them. "We are soldiers in our own right? We've been in battle, haven't we?

Can you imagine if some Shithead decided to give us grief about how we handled the demodogs or that freaking Gore Goblin?"

Lucas snickered at 'Gore Goblin', but straightened quickly. "It would suck. It would make me mad. People have no idea what we've done. We've saved them and they don't even know. I feel for Rambo in this movie. He keeps telling the Sheriff not to push him; that he didn't do anything wrong. But the Sheriff didn't care. Different kind of prejudice."

Steve let out a heavy sign. "A different kind for sure."

Lucas met Steve's eyes and the clerk could see emotion welling in them. He could see that Lucas was wanted to keep it in. Steve wouldn't push.

"Max and I broke up," Lucas declared. "Again."

"Sorry to hear it, man," Steve said, taking it in stride. This had to be the fourth time they had broken up. Max had dumped him three times and taken him back each time. The reasons were never super serious. No cheating or abuse or other heavy shit. There had been a couple of lies, offensive comments, and stupid shit like Lucas looking at other girls. Black girls. Teen drama. "What did you do this time?"

Lucas didn't answer immediately. He didn't jump to his own defense. He just stood there, quietly. The silence went on longer than was comfortable for Steve,

"Lucas?"

"I broke it off with her, Steve," Lucas said, seriously. The kid was not relaxed. His body language had stiffened and his face tightened.

"You what?" Steve asked, incredulous.

"I broke up with her. And before you ask the obvious 'why?', let me tell you. She loves me too much."

"She what?" Steve asked, still wondering what the hell had happened.

"She's smothering me," Lucas added. "She's needy."

"You're being smothered?" Steve replied, shaking his head. "The one she calls Stalker?"

"I don't expect you to understand-"

"You're damn right I don't understand," Steve interjected, suddenly and inexplicable frustrated. "Of course she's needy, Dipshit! You know where she's come from. Divorce, permissive mom, abusive step-father and step-brother. Put the Upside Down on top of all the shit and how do you think she feels?"

Lucas was taken aback by Steve's forceful response. "Why are you taking her side?"

Steve let out another breath. "I'm sorry, Lucas. I'm not taking sides. But, you breaking up with a spark plug like Max doesn't make sense."

"Why?" Lucas asked, defensively. "Because I can't get anyone else? I'm a nerd and you're surprised Max even likes me? Or is it because I'm black and this town is ghostly white!"

Steve's eyes went wide and he backed away from the counter until he hit the wall behind him. It was his turn to be shocked. "Fuck no, Sinclair! None of that shit. The Family doesn't play that way. Truth and Lies. No in between. Now, what happened? The truth this time. And, don't give me that she's needy."

Lucas went quiet again, determining what he would say. "Got any Mountain Dew?"

"No, Lucas. No Mountain Dew."

Lucas pursed his lips and nodded slightly. "I'm tired of the scrutiny, Steve. You can't understand it, so don't try. I am telling you the truth. I'm tired of the eyes on us. I'm tired of nasty, inappropriate comments. I'm tired of defending us. I'm tired of defending her. It's different when it's just me. It's the way of the world. I know how to handle myself when it comes to prejudice. My parents made sure of it. But I don't want Max to have to...to want to defend me because of it. I really don't want it directed at her because of me."

Steve ran his hand through his hair. "That's heavy, Dude. I'm not sure

how to respond. Or that I should."

"Yeah, I know," Lucas replied, deflated. "But you know what? I respect you, Man. You have our backs. We have been in battle together and that make you my brother. You want you go deep, then there you go."

"Thank you, Lucas," Steve said, his voice deep with emotion. "None of you Little S-have ever said it that way. We have an understanding, I guess. But, it means a lot to hear you say it."

"Don't worry about it, Steve," Lucas replied, returning to his usual self. "Not many bosses with a bat like yours."

"All bats aside," Steve said. "You have to make a choice, Lucas. Max loves you. You love her. I'm pretty sure. If you guys have made it through over a year of all that garbage, you can keep it up. Hey, I have nothing in the way of shared experience in this, but I do regret losing Nancy. My choices, Man. I let her slip through my fingers. Just something to think about."

"I knew I could count on you, Steve," Lucas praised. "Wise beyond your own understanding. Kind of like the Fonz. This place is like his office. It smells better than a restaurant bathroom for sure."

"I'm not that smart," Steve deflected. "I don't say it...ever. But, I care about you guys. Now that Hopper is gone, and Joyce, El, and Will, it's just us. We have to stick together."

"I couldn't agree more," Lucas said. "Gotta make sure Mike doesn't fall off the edge of the world."

"For sure. As far as what you decide, I'm sure I'll know soon enough. Talk to your parents again. See what they say."

"I will, Steve. I promise."

"Now, you should probably be getting to school. Mike and Dustin will be wondering where you are. Max will be worried."

"What do you think John Rambo would do?" Luke asked through a grin.

Steve put on his dough eyes and said: "Probably kill them all and let God sort them out."

"That's not gonna work here, is it?"

"Not at all. Now get along. I've got customers to help."

"Not a single customer, Steve."

"Alright!" Steve said with fake exasperation. "Gosh. I want to watch this movie. Get the hell out!"

"On my way," Lucas drawled. "On my way."